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QUEEN SIRIKIT THANKS REFUGEE AGENCIES

NEW YORK -- In an extraordinary departure from protocol, Her Majesty Queen Sirikit of Thailand stood alone before a group of representatives from American religious and secular voluntary agencies to thank them for their efforts in Indochinese refugee resettlement.

"May I stand in a gesture of respect to all of you," the Queen said at a special audience held March 19 in her suite in the Towers of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. "You are the people whom I have longed to meet and to whom I owe this tremendous sense of gratitude."

Queen Sirikit held the private audience as part of her visit to the United States to promote silk weaving and other Thai cottage industries.

Her Majesty spoke of the strain placed upon the Thai population by the sudden influx of Indochinese refugees, especially from neighboring Cambodia. She said that her personal involvement in the refugee crisis was the direct result of letters she had received from junior officers in the Thai army regiment of which she is honorary Colonel-in-Chief. In June, 1979, the officers wrote the Queen of their concern at having to turn new Khmer refugees back at the Thai border, acting under orders from superior officers.

The Queen approached the Cabinet Ministers of Thailand and offered to help in her role as President of the Thai Red Cross. As a result of her efforts, additional refugee camps were established in Thailand.

The Queen told the visitors in her suite that she had visited several refugee camps, often spending the night there, and had witnessed first-hand "the compassion and care" shown by American religious and secular groups, who "fed and cleaned refugees too sick and too weak to care for themselves."

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The Queen said that "when the first influx of refugees came, I tried my best as a Buddhist to save lives." She said she prayed "for guidance, for someone to help." American resettlement assistance, as well as food and medical supplies for Cambodians, she said, was the answer to her prayer. Her Majesty thanked the group for their work in resettling 168,000 Indochinese refugees a year in the U.S., and for Cambodian relief, and added, "I hope that with your help we can continue to save lives."

While the U.S. government allows refugees to enter this country and provides some financial assistance, the work of receiving, placing and resettling refugees is carried out by the private sector.

Her Majesty's remarks followed expressions of thanks and support from several of the invited guests. Leo Cherne, chairman of the Citizens' Commission on Indochinese Refugees and the International Rescue Committee, told the Queen of "the gratitude we feel to you, to the people and the government of Thailand for responding to the massive tragedy of the Khmer people." He also spoke of the group's "deepest admiration and warm affection for your own personal commitment," especially to orphaned children who are being housed and cared for under the Queen's direct sponsorship.

The Rt. Rev. John M. Allin, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, said, "We are bound together by compassion and sympathy." The refugee problem, he said, "makes us aware of the common humanity we share." Bishop Allin told the Queen that although churches and other voluntary agencies have made a considerable impact on refugee resettlement, "We are ever mindful of how much help is still needed." He pledged to "continue to seek new ways to combine our efforts and find resources to save lives."

Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, national director of inter-Jewish affairs for the American Jewish Committee, thanked Queen Sirikit for her work and said: "How different our history might have been had there been a Thailand in 1939" to receive Jews fleeing Nazi oppression. Rabbi Tanenbaum spoke of the shared belief of Buddhists, Jews and Christians in "the dignity of every human life created in the sacred image. Thailand has become a symbol to the world of what a difference people can make."

The Rev. John Houck, general secretary of the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A., asked the Queen to convey a "word of assurance" to the Thai people that the system of refugee resettlement is working well. Dr. Houck had high praise for the "excellent cooperation" by the Thai government prior to the departure of refugees for the United States.

Mr. Cherne, who acted as principal spokesman for the group, cited the other guests, including Mrs. Robert J. Dawson, assistant director for migration affairs of the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief. He praised Mrs. Dawson's energy and said, "If the rest of us failed or flagged, she would make us get on with the job."

Other guests at the audience included: Warren Meeker, chairman of the board, Research Institute of America, and member, Citizens' Commission; The Rev. Robert Charlebois, Catholic Relief Services and United States Catholic Conference; Dr. Paul McCleary, executive director, Church World Service; Nancy Nicalo, director, Immigration and Refugee Program, Church World Service; Mr. Burton Monasch, Monasch, Chazan & Stream, Attorneys at Law, chairman, American Jewish Committee; Ingrid Walter, director, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service and chairman, Migration and Refugee Committee, American Council of Voluntary Agencies in Foreign Service; Edwin Shapiro, president of the board, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society; Gaynor I. Jacobson, executive vice president, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society; Wells C. Klein, executive director, American Council for Nationalities Service; Grady Mangham, vice president for refugee resettlement, World Relief; Richard W. Taylor, vice president, board of directors, Tolstoy Foundation; Teymuraz K. Bagration, executive director, Tolstoy Foundation; Donald Payne, chairman for refugee work, National and International YMCA; Frank Kiehne, executive director for International Division, YMCA; Dr. Jan Propanek, president, American Fund for Czechoslovak Refugees; and James A. Linen III, Linen, Fortinberry and Associates, Inc.

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PICTURE CAPTIONS

80102/1 Her Majesty Queen Sirikit of Thailand held a special audience in New York on March 19 to thank a group of representatives from United States religious and secular voluntary agencies for their efforts in Indochinese refugee resettlement. One of those who met with her was the Rt. Rev. John M. Allin, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, who told the Queen, "We are bound together by compassion and sympathy."

80102/2 In an extraordinary departure from protocol, Her Majesty Queen Sirikit of Thailand stood alone before a group of representatives from United States religious and secular voluntary agencies to thank them for their efforts in Indochinese refugee resettlement. Presiding Bishop John M. Allin was one of the representatives of the Episcopal Church who attended the March 19 audience in the Queen's suite at the Towers of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York.

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